

The French Revolution and Napoleon

By the beginning of the 21st century, the word **revolution** is used to connote all manner of events, movements, and products. There are revolutions in music, athletics, painting, technology, and literature. Running shoes, computer games, television shows and guitarists can be revolutionary. In light of such wide and varied usage we need to come to a common understanding of the definition so that we can better analyse the events of the two decades that straddled the turn of the 19th century. We will talk of revolution as a process of relatively rapid change—change in political structure, social organization. Many revolutions revolve around competing ideologies or world views. Vital to this is the notion of revolution as a process rather than an event. By looking at the French Revolution as a process, we can identify characteristics common to socio-political revolution that will then help us analyse and understand other revolutions.

Revolution A process of relatively rapid societal change.

While we examine the complex developments that swept over Europe in the period from the mid-18th century to 1815 we will keep a weather eye to the great historic processes of concern to all historians—continuity and change; and cause and effect.

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- understand the political, social, and economic causes of the French Revolution
- demonstrate an understanding of the progress of the Revolution through this period
- evaluate the international impact of the Revolution and Napoleonic period
- analyse the rise of Napoleon
- assess both the foreign and domestic policy of Napoleonic France
- explain the political, social, and economic effects of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire.

Origins: challenges posed and unmet

Intellectual challenges

"I saw that everything depended fundamentally on politics, and that, no people could ever be anything but what the nature of its government made it." Lynn Hunt, quoting Jean Jacques Rousseau, used these words in the opening to her study on the French Revolution to describe the novelty of the situation of France in the mid-18th century. When Rousseau wrote them, he was suggesting what would go on to become a central tenet of the French

Revolution, that there was a very direct relationship between a government and the people it ruled—that politics was central to the everyday life of all citizens.

Hobbes and Locke

Rousseau was one of a number of important thinkers that were turning their considerable intellects to what they saw as a central question of the 18th century—who should rule? A century before the *Bastille* fell in Paris, however, two English philosophers were grappling with this very question, arriving at two very different conclusions. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke shared a conviction that the **legitimacy** of any form of government had to be justified through rational thought and not, as it had in the past, by resort to theology or tradition. It was not enough for a government to claim that its right to rule rested on the will of God or the simple fact that it had always been thus. The proper form of government could be reasoned, according to Hobbes and Locke, and this very reasoning was the foundation of the right to rule.

Legitimacy is the characteristic of government that has the support of those whom it rules. It is the belief, by the ruled, that the government is the rightful ruler.

In the study of history, as in much of life, context is vital to understanding cause and effect. Hobbes developed much of his political thinking during the English Civil War of the 1640s. This period of destruction and instability had a profound effect on Hobbes's view of human nature and consequently what he believed the proper form of government should be. His rather low opinion of human beings and what he saw as a constant competitive struggle for survival in nature led him to the conclusion that a strong absolutist form of government was the best defence against the great beast of civil unrest. In this conception, humans would give up their individual rights to the absolute ruler in return for the stability provided by this ruler. This transaction, according to Hobbes, was a one-time affair. Once people gave up their rights, their fate, for good or ill, was in the hands of the ruler. In practical terms, this meant that citizens had no right to rebel regardless of the actions of the government. For Hobbes, absolutism was not the end in itself, but rather a means to an end—and this end was civil peace and concord.

John Locke, starting from an alternative view of human nature, arrived at a very different conclusion as to the nature of government. While Hobbes believed that humans in a **state of nature** were in a state of perpetual conflict, Locke saw humans as reasonable and peaceful, naturally inclined to co-operate in the best interests of society. According to Locke, humans in this state of nature had certain **inalienable rights** by virtue of the fact that they were human. As a keen proponent of the human capacity to learn, Locke trusted that humans had the capacity for self-government, the primary duty of which was to protect the life, liberty, and property of the governed. The relationship between the government and the governed was one of mutual obligation and responsibility. What would happen should the government fail in this duty? Locke advocated that citizens had the right to change this government, peacefully or otherwise, should it fail to protect their life, liberty or property. They had the right to rebel.

A state of nature is the theoretical state of humans in the absence of organized society. This is the starting point from which many Enlightenment thinkers tried to determine the ideal form of government. It is closely related to "human nature".

Inalienable rights are those personal rights that accrue to people by virtue of the fact that they are alive. These are rights conferred by nature and cannot be taken away. Exactly what these rights are is a matter for debate.

Because of the different conclusions that they each reached, the ideas of Hobbes and Locke were seized upon by opposing sides in a number of political conflicts during their lifetimes and in the years after they died. The language and visions of Locke pervade the founding documents of the United States. The logic, if not the deeper motives and principles, of Hobbes has been invoked to rationalize state power into the 20th and 21st centuries.

While they embarked on their enquiry from different premises which, in turn, led them to different conclusions, what they had in common was perhaps more important. Both were convinced that the proper application of human reason could lead to the best form of government without recourse to archaic tradition or arcane theology. Perhaps more importantly, they both conceived of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled as a **social contract**. This **contract theory** approach to political philosophy would dominate discussion in the coffee houses and **salons** of Europe for the century leading up to the French Revolution and help structure the essential debates within the Revolution itself.

Voltaire

Four years after Locke published his seminal work of political philosophy and democratic ideals, *Two Treatises of Government*, in 1689, François-Marie Arouet, known to history by his pen name, Voltaire, was born. Throughout his life, Voltaire would use his pen to mock and skewer ideas and people he believed contemptible and laud and praise those who espoused and lived his ideas of personal freedom. In many ways, Voltaire was a combination of Hobbes and Locke. He believed, as did Locke, in the human ability to learn and the idea that reason should guide all decisions of state. He shared with Hobbes a very low opinion of humans in their natural state, and their inability in this natural state to govern themselves. It was this lack of faith in the uneducated masses, which confirmed Voltaire as a fervent opponent of indiscriminate democracy. Who should rule, but the educated and able, according to Voltaire. So long as they ruled according to Enlightenment principles—progress, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of thought, organized and rational policy—Voltaire did not care how much power they had. It is in his emphasis on reason and freedom wherein Voltaire's political legacy lay. Institutions such as the Church and the Monarchy whose control, according to Voltaire, was based on superstition, tradition, and force, rather than reason, were archaic and deserved to be swept away or at the very least ridiculed. Voltaire wrote volumes criticizing these institutions. Satire, novels, drama, essays, histories were all tools that Voltaire employed in his assault on the enemies of reason.

Discussion point: The state of nature

The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1690

During the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that conditions called war; and such a war, as if of every man, against every man.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651

Both Locke and Hobbes began their inquiry with the state of nature, but their views of human nature were somewhat different.



Who do you think was more accurate in his estimation of the state of nature? Why?

A social contract is a voluntary agreement by individuals to co-operate in the organization of society.

Contract theory is the theory in political science that organized society rests on an agreement between those who rule and those who are ruled. Accordingly, both ruled and rulers have rights and responsibilities.

Salons were gatherings of individuals in the 17th century in which the current events, ideas, literature, and science were discussed. They were often organized by prominent women and were important forums for the dissemination of new ideas.

Voltaire (1694–1778)

Voltaire was the pen name of François-Marie Arouet a French writer of satire, political treatises, drama, history, philosophies, and novels. He became one of the most important and influential of the Enlightenment thinkers. His fame was such that he was able to live on the proceeds of his writing and the pensions that his reputation garnered him. In terms of his philosophy, he was a champion of personal freedom. This often took the form of satirical works lampooning the Catholic Church and calling for religious freedom. No advocate for democracy, which he believed to be little better than mob rule, Voltaire instead favoured the rule of the able—the Enlightened despot, guided by reason and unencumbered by religious superstition. Frederick the Great of Prussia, with whom he corresponded and resided for a number of years, was as close a model to that despot as Voltaire could find in 18th-century Europe.

**TOK Link****Ways of Knowing—Reason**

The watchword for the Enlightenment and many of the developments that flowed from it such as the French Revolution was “Reason”. Enlightenment thinkers believed that through the careful application of reason, as opposed to superstition, tradition, bigotry, and intolerance, a more ordered and “natural” society would emerge. This elevation of reason reached its peak in 1793 when radical French Republicans, bent on the de-Christianization of French society, formalized this “reason worship” in the Cult of Reason, complete with festivals and ritual.



What are the strengths and weaknesses of using reason as the sole organizing principle of society? How could other ways of knowing be used to guide society?

Rousseau

If Voltaire was the intellect of the Revolution, Jean Jacques Rousseau was its heart, and like many matters of the heart his contribution was ambiguous, contradictory and fraught with double meaning. He shared a number of ideas regarding the relationship of the individual to the state with Voltaire and John Locke. He believed that humans, by virtue of being human, were imbued with certain inalienable rights. His later writings were based on contract theory. For Rousseau society was based on a social contract among all citizens. But whereas Locke and Hobbes saw this contract as an agreement between the rulers and the ruled, Rousseau saw it as an agreement between the citizens themselves. This civil society was to be ruled not by kings or governments or bureaucracies but rather by an amorphous concept he called the **General Will**. The General Will was the embodiment of the wishes of the people. While this may seem straightforward, the difficulty came in determining what that general will actually was. While a majority vote may be useful, Rousseau did not think it could be the only, or even the main, gauge. The General Will was more the collective good of the whole society—the common interests that united the people. These community interests were to take precedence over individual interests. This vague conceptualization, though popular among many before the Revolution, was to prove fractious and even deadly as the Revolution moved forward. The prime stumbling block was how exactly to determine the General Will, or, more precisely, who spoke for or knew the General Will. Revolutionaries of all political stripes claimed to understand the General Will more completely than their opponents. This ambiguity has helped Rousseau’s ideas live long into the 20th century. While 20th century democrats have claimed the system of majority voting in a modern liberal democracy is the most efficient method of determining the General Will, dictators throughout the century have claimed a special knowledge of the General Will, which uniquely positions them to lead the state.

The General Will was Rousseau’s notion of what was good or desirable for a society as determined by the population as a whole and not just individual interests.

Beyond the General Will, Rousseau's spectre floats through the entire revolutionary period. In commenting on the nationalistic aspirations of the Poles, Rousseau presaged the nationalistic aspirations of the French republic. His words would echo in the speeches of major revolutionaries of all parties. Marie Antoinette was an admirer. Rousseau's philosophies shaped Robespierre's thinking. His tomb was an important pilgrimage. His imprecise political conceptions could be seized upon by any number of very different ideologies precisely because they were imprecise. As historians such as Simon Schama and Lynn Hunt have illustrated, perhaps Rousseau's most important contribution to the French Revolution was that he helped provide a language that all the participants of the Revolution could use to express new ideas and programmes.

Social challenges

Every society or group has a structure, an understood organization of society, which places the participants in roles and assigns expectations, influence and power. In some cases this structure is formalized in rules or laws, while in other circumstances it develops on its own. Ranks in the military are officially prescribed while social positions that develop in schools are not officially sanctioned though are no less real for it. Occasionally this phenomenon can lead to two or more competing social structures within one group. In one sense this was the case with pre-revolutionary France. On the one hand there was an official social structure prescribed by law that had existed for centuries. On the other hand, over the first decades of the 18th century the reality of everyday life in France had evolved into a new social order that was in many cases quite different to what it was supposed to be "on paper".

The *ancien régime* in theory and law

The official social structure of France, laid down in law and observed for centuries, was based on a system of feudal obligations. Officially every subject of the French King belonged to one of three official classes, called estates. At the top of this pyramidal social structure was the person and institution of the monarch—the "first gentleman of the realm". On paper the French King was absolute; his will was law. This principle was best illustrated in the practice of *lettre de cachet*—a document signed by the King, which authorized his arbitrary power. This arbitrary power could mean the imprisonment or banishment of a subject—noble or otherwise—the suspension of assemblies, or the registration of new taxes. To its detractors, *lettres de cachet* were the embodiment of despotism, ruling by whim. To proponents of traditional absolutism, they were an earthly expression of **divine right**.

The first estate consisted of the clergy, from the most powerful cardinal or bishop, to the poorest of the parish priests and made up about one per cent of the population. At the top of this estate were the cardinals, bishops and abbots who possessed or controlled most of the churches' wealth. Many of the clergy came from aristocratic families who saw the clergy as an acceptable outlet for sons in excess of what the family fortune could support. As an institution, the Catholic Church controlled or owned up to a tenth of the land in

Discussion point:

Although they may not call it the General Will, throughout the 20th century both democratic and non-democratic governments have claimed to act in the interests of the General Will.



How did the following regimes claim to know the General Will?

- France, 1958
- Germany, 1933
- USSR, 1936

Divine right This is the short form of Divine Right of Kings, the political theory that a monarch's right to rule, his or her legitimacy, is conferred by God. The monarch's will, therefore, becomes closely associated with the will of God.

France. It had powers of taxation, specifically the *tithe*, a Church tax on agricultural products that could either be collected by individual clergy or by one of the many powerful Church “corporations” such as monasteries. The First Estate enjoyed influence at the highest political level. High-ranking officers of the Church had been appointed to top government positions for centuries. One such example in the years leading up to the Revolution, was the appointment of the Archbishop of Toulouse, Loménie de Brienne as chief minister to Louis XVI.

The roughly 300,000 to 400,000 French subjects who were officially members of the Noble or Second Estate were marked by the official privilege they enjoyed. Indeed, it was “privilege” which was the essential element of the concept of “nobility” in France of the 18th century. Nobles drew their position from their feudal role as the warriors of the realm, *noblesse d’épée*—**Nobility of the Sword**. To these nobles were added, sometime later, a second class of nobility, aristocrats whose nobility derived from promotion to royal administrative positions. These were *la noblesse de robe*—the **Nobility of the Robe**. The privileges they enjoyed were many, from ceremonial distinction in terms of dress and emblems to the very practical exemption from the onerous direct tax called the *taille*. They had a virtual monopoly of high office in the government, army, navy and Church and controlled the provincial assemblies and *parlements*. To these privileges, the French nobility, specifically the rural nobility, could add myriad rights and dues from hunting rights to *banalités*—fees for milling, pressing wine and any number of other agrarian services. They were tried in separate courts and had the right to imprison members of the Third Estate on a whim.

About 98 per cent of the population of France officially belonged to the Third Estate. This included rural peasants, urban wage earners, bankers, lawyers, bureaucrats, and journalists. Officially the main tax burden, the *taille*, fell on the Third Estate. They were also subject to the *tithe*, the *capitation* tax, property tax if they owned property, the *vingtième*, the *banalités*, military service, and any number of indirect taxes on goods such as salt (the *gabelle*).

The *ancien régime* in reality

By the 1780s, however, this social structure though preserved in tradition and even law, looked very different. In practice there were two levels of clergy. The upper clergy in many cases saw the priesthood as but one of a number of sources of income and influence. Talleyrand would hold several lucrative Church positions before he was even ordained to the priesthood. Many of the upper clergy were absentees from their parishes, delegating or even selling the less glamorous local administration of their Church properties. They collected taxes and enjoyed great influence in government and even some at court.

Nobility of the Sword This is the more ancient category of nobility in France and dates from the feudal period when elevation to the aristocracy was through military service.

Nobility of the Robe This category of nobility in France was relatively new and rewarded those who performed administrative service to the crown. Because it did not depend on military service or heredity, it was the category that was open to more Frenchmen and was therefore growing in size.



Il faut espérer que ce jeu finira bientôt (we must hope that things will soon sort themselves out). A popular depiction of French social structure in the period leading up to 1789 was that of the Third Estate supporting the First and Second Estate. To what degree is this an accurate depiction? How might a member of the Second Estate depict the social structure of France under the *ancien régime*?

The lower clergy enjoyed few such privileges. While they ministered to their flock, their position in local society had been diminished by the **secularization** of the Enlightenment. Likewise their income suffered during this period. The tithe had been altered in many parts of France such that it would barely support the local clergy. In these cases the value of the tithe had been transferred to larger Church corporations such as monasteries or bishoprics or even in some cases to non-church interests that would then pay a fixed portion to the local clergy—the *portion congrue*. It was then up to the local clergy to collect the tax from their parishioners. The fixed nature of the *congrue* meant that as the cost of living increased, the material position of the local clergy decreased. The position of parish clergy had deteriorated to such an extent by the 1770s that groups of disaffected priests began to gather in groups to voice their anger. The despotic authority of the upper clergy quickly outlawed such assemblies. In short, power, influence and wealth was unevenly distributed in the state-within-a-state that was the French Catholic Church and, too many, unfairly so.

The reality of the Second Estate during the second half of the 18th century was likewise far more complex than its legal status might suggest. Foremost was the fact that the boundaries between the Estates were permeable. Nobility and the privilege that accompanied it was available to those who could afford it. A number of **venal offices** carried with them the status of nobility and in many cases hereditary nobility. As demand for these offices increased so did the price, limiting all but the wealthiest members of the Third Estate from taking this route to nobility. Another strategy for ennoblement was to ask the Crown to convert the office already held by the aspiring noble into one that conferred nobility. This, of course took money, but was not uncommon in the 18th century. Service to the government was another avenue into the Second Estate. The King would regularly grant **letters patent** to those who had distinguished themselves in the service of France or the person of the King. A number of engineers, writers, scientists, and artists were ennobled in this fashion. In total, historian William Doyle estimates that wealthy members of the Third Estate were making their way into the ranks of nobility at an average rate of two people per day throughout the 18th century. Including their families this adds up to about 45,000 new nobles.

The terms Nobility of the Robe and Nobility of the Sword no longer encompassed the vast array of occupations from which the French nobility drew income. A great many nobles participated in commerce from owning mining interests to banking and mercantile trade. Nobles, as a social class, participated in most aspects of the 18th century French economy. They owned land, loaned money, invested in shipping ventures and served in government. In fact, the political influence of the nobility had grown steadily since the death of Louis XIV, who had devoted a great deal of his reign and his country's resources to controlling the nobility. Throughout the reign of Louis XV and Louis XVI, French aristocrats had succeeded in gaining most of this back with interest. The political influence of the nobility came from their basic monopoly of high office, specifically control of the regional *parlements*. *Parlements* were the legal nexus of the realm,

Secularization The growing emphasis on non-religious ideas in a society.

Venal offices were administrative positions within the French government that could be purchased. The purchase of a venal office was one avenue to nobility for those who could afford it.

Letters patent were documents signed by the King that conferred some exclusive right such as a pension or trading monopoly.

Discussion point:

The French King could recognize distinguished citizens by ennobling them. How are such citizens recognized in your country?

where royal will met the population. As France's highest courts they were an important link in the legislative chain, registering all laws proclaimed by the King. The *parlements* and the 1,200 to 2,200 judges and officials that administered them were alternately seen as champions of the will of the people against autocratic rule or the instrument of that rule. Regardless, from the time of Louis XV the nobility and the *parlements* had been gaining power.

Astounding wealth was not the whole story of the nobility of Louis XVI. In fact, by some estimates, it was not the story for over half of the noble families of France in this period. Many nobles were of only moderate means, and some reduced to utter poverty. Some owned small estates. Others earned a living farming small plots of land. In lifestyle they were little different from their peasant neighbors and in some cases worse off. In many ways, all these nobles had was the theoretical privilege that birth granted them and as such they were determined to protect it.

The reality of the Third Estate also bore little resemblance to the traditional feudal order. As mentioned previously, the boundary between the Second and Third Estate was very permeable. The wealthiest of the Third Estate ennobled themselves by purchasing venal offices or marrying into noble families. Tax exemptions, a great mark of privilege, were freely bought and sold. **Bourgeois** families purchased huge country estates, luxuriating in the physical and social comfort that accompanied them. More and more of the land in France, perhaps a quarter by the Revolution, was owned by the bourgeoisie. The money for this social mobility came from the rapidly expanding commercial revolution of the 18th century. Trading opportunities presented themselves from all over the world. The products and profit from these ventures in turn fed a growing industrial complex. Professional and financial enterprises, such as banking and legal services, grew to meet the demands of these commercial and industrial concerns. The result was a bourgeois class that was growing in number, influence and wealth.

At the other extreme of the Third Estate were the poor, and by all accounts there were many in 18th-century France. By some estimates the poor could number up to one third of the population of the country, perhaps even higher in bad times. A growing population and a rising cost of living, which over the course of the 18th century had outstripped the increase in wages by a factor of 3:1, compounded this problem. The vast majority of the French population were peasants, upwards of 80 per cent, and they owned and worked as small farms about 20 per cent of the land in France. France was a country of small farmers. This agrarian system was therefore susceptible to the vagaries of the small farm—rising input prices and bad weather. Most of these farm families were forced to supplement their income with wage earning propositions at various times during the year. Many of these opportunities were in local towns and cities. Skilled trades in these cities and towns were very difficult to enter, controlled as they were by powerful guilds. The Third Estate itself, then, was a pyramidal shape itself, with the wealthy bourgeoisie at the top slipping into the Second Estate once they had amassed enough wealth and the vast majority of the rural farming poor at the bottom.

Discussion point:

The day-to-day administration of France was an incredibly complex enterprise, requiring the work of countless officials and institutions.



To what extent was Louis XVI an absolute monarch?

The bourgeoisie was the social/economic class in French society that was technically part of the Third Estate, but whose members earned their living through business ownership as in merchants and bankers, or a professional occupation such as lawyers. As such they tended to be the wealthiest of the Third Estate.

The truth of the **ancien régime**, then, was considerably different than it looked in law and tradition. It was not as stagnant as it looked. Social mobility, especially between the Third and Second Estate, was well established. Nor were there, simply, three estates. All three estates were subdivided by wealth, power, and influence. The wealthy landowning bourgeois had far more in common with the middling nobility that they did with the peasant farmers of the realm. The lifestyle of indigent nobility resembled the rural poor far more than it did the powerful noble families of Paris. Even the First Estate was a stratified hierarchy not only of formalized rank, but also of power and wealth. The historian R.R. Palmer has thus characterized the social causes of the French Revolution as a collision of two moving objects—a rising aristocracy and a rising bourgeoisie. But we also see a lesser nobility bent on defending the last vestiges of noble privilege and a rural population that was one bad harvest away from rebellion, which made this volatile situation unstable. In any case, the legal social structures of the *ancien régime* no longer corresponded to the reality of power, wealth, and influence distribution in France.

The **ancien régime** is the term that refers to the structure of French society and its government before the Revolution.

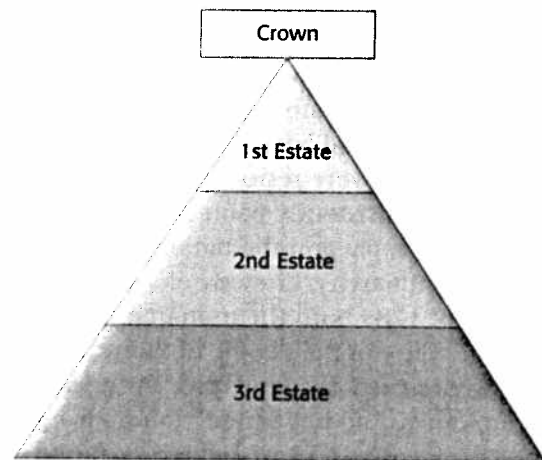
Activity:

Social structure

The social structure has often been visually represented by a triangle depicting the relative size and power of the three estates.

On a large piece of poster board create a diagram that depicts the social structure of your school. The diagram can be any shape and should identify the major social groups within the school, their membership and the relative power they have to each other. Be sure to include the staff and administration of your school. Once you have completed the diagram, present it to the class and explain why you chose the physical representation that you did. How might your depiction differ from how the administration would depict the social structure of the school?

Create a second illustration, this time depict the social structure of your country. What similarities and differences are there between the social structure of the *ancien régime* and your country? The basis for social power within the *ancien régime* was land and hereditary title. What is the basis of social power in your country?



Political challenges

Very simply defined, politics is the process by which groups of people make decisions. In the France of Louis XVI, however, there was nothing simple about it. While in theory, Louis was absolute, his will was law, in reality he depended on a complex system of assemblies, courts, and bureaucracies to translate this will, not only into law, but more crucially into obedience. This is the central issue for all governments, be they democracies, autocracies, theocracies, or oligarchies. How do you cause the ruled to obey the law? Generally,

citizens obey for a combination of two motivations—a fear of sanction and a belief in the legitimacy of either the law or the law-making institution. In the years leading up to the Revolution these two elements were achieved through the combination of a belief in the right of the King to rule tempered by the courts, **parlements**, and assemblies, augmented by a fear of arbitrary arrest, the mass enforcement of the army and the more selective enforcement of the constabulary or *Maréchaussée*. Although there had always been varying degrees of tension within this complex system of compliance, it came to a head in the years immediately preceding the Revolution.

Parlements were French courts of the *ancien régime* whose role was to carry out and interpret the administrative laws as set out by the Royal Government. It was also their traditional role to challenge these laws when they were believed to overstep the traditional power of the monarch.

The key tool of opposition to the absolute power of the monarchy was the system of *parlements*—the highest courts in the realm. These thirteen *parlements* were located in provincial centres and manned by noble judges. Apart from administering justice and performing any number of bureaucratic tasks necessary for local commerce to function, it was their duty to register all laws proclaimed by the monarch and, more importantly, to issue remonstrances pointing out any errors in the laws. In this way the *parlements* could delay legislation, thereby acting as a check on the sovereign will of the King. Depending on the legislation and how it might affect the relative position of the nobility to the monarch, it was a check that they did not hesitate to use, especially the powerful *parlement* of Paris. For his part the King could resort to *lettres de cachet* to coerce the *parlements* to acquiesce to his will. Such conflicts grew more heated in the decades leading up to the Revolution. Louis XV clashed frequently with the *parlements* during his reign. Perhaps the most divisive came near the end of his reign in 1766 when his chief minister, René Nicolas de Maupeou, tried to implement legislation without the consent of the noble justices. They were exiled and their venal offices abolished. It was not until Louis XVI ascended to the throne, in a more conciliatory mood at the beginning of his reign than his grandfather had been at the end of his, that the pre-Maupeou *parlements* were restored. Throughout these battles, the *parlement* would consistently paint themselves as the guardians of the freedoms of the people and the nation against the unrestricted tyranny of the monarchy. They would not always be seen as such. By the spring of 1789 both the monarchy and the *parlements* had lost, in the eyes of many of the people of France, the legitimacy upon which obedience partially depended. In the absence of this legitimacy, the government would have to rely on their monopoly of force, but this would prove to be a short-sighted recourse. It was this kind of obstruction that Charles-Alexandre de Calonne encountered when he attempted to reform the French financial system.

The financial crisis

It has become a cliché to speak of the long-term and immediate causes of the French Revolution in terms of powder kegs and sparks. Nevertheless, the factors that we have so far discussed had been brewing for a number of years and even decades. What brought matters to a head in 1789 was a financial crisis that bordered on collapse. It was not a matter of absolute numbers, however. France's debt did not nearly equal that of the British. Great Britain spent

roughly the same proportion of its budget on debt and defence. Instead, the crisis revolved around the simple financial fact that what the French government took in as revenue came nowhere near to servicing the nation's long-term obligations.

Extravagance of foreign wars

Much of these long-term obligations were the result of half a century of ambitious and not always successful foreign policy. The **Seven Years War** was nothing short of a struggle for global supremacy between France and Britain—much was at stake. Fighting ranged from Continental Europe to the subcontinent of India to North America. In the end, it was British naval power that decided the outcome. From Quebec to India, if it was not the Royal Navy that won the battles, it certainly secured and consolidated these victories. For as successful as British arms had been during this global war, having won victories in all theatres and maintaining her command of the seas, the peace was far from disastrous for the French. They gave up largely unprofitable land in North America to the British and the Spanish, but maintained their interests in the far more profitable Caribbean. In India, the French also maintained commercial interests. The Seven Years War did not significantly interrupt French trade with any part of the world.

Strategically and emotionally, however, the effects of the Seven Years War on the French were far more ambiguous. The military, social and political influence of France had been humbled around the globe. In the time of Louis XIV, the French army had been the standard to which modern armies aspired. By 1763 the world looked to Prussia for a model modern army and to the British for an exemplar of naval power. The war itself had been massively expensive. By 1764, servicing the French debt took 60 per cent of the annual budget; three times what it had been a decade earlier. Although Schama has pointed out that these numbers were in line and in some cases less than other European powers, they were still a significant concern for the financiers of France. Part of the problem lay in the fact that the combination of a bruised national pride and a global trading network that remained intact led French foreign ministers to conclude that they would need to rebuild and maintain a massive peacetime army and navy. While re-establishing this global presence, they would also pursue France's traditional foreign policy of maintaining a balance of power on the European Continent. The upshot of this ambitious strategy was that once the prospect of revenge against the British rose among the disgruntled citizens of the Thirteen Colonies of America in the 1770s, military spending accelerated again, especially for the navy.

When the American colonists declared their independence in 1776, the French Foreign Minister Charles Gravier, Count de Vergennes saw an opportunity to strike a blow both for French prestige and against British global hegemony. The problem was how to finance it. The King's finance minister, Anne Robert Jacques Turgot cautioned against anything as extravagant as a foreign war. As this was not what the King or his other ministers wanted to hear, Turgot found himself replaced by the more accommodating Swiss

The Seven Years War was a struggle between the powers of Europe in the years 1756–63. The primary antagonists were France and Great Britain. Through the terms of the Treaty of Paris, Britain strengthened her colonial empire while French colonial holdings shrank.



How did the fact that the Seven Years War was a global war affect France in the years following 1763?

Protestant financier Jacques Necker. Necker believed that if French finances could be rationalized, a popular Enlightenment notion, confidence in its financial system would be bolstered, allowing the American war to be financed with loans rather than taxes. As all loans, as well as taxes, had to be registered by the *parlements*, this was a politically astute plan. Taxes are always less politically palatable than loans. And, in the short term, it was successful. Necker was able to raise over 500 million *livres* between 1777 and 1781. But by the time the Americans had definitively won their independence this would only amount to about half the overall cost of the war for the French. All told, the French debt in 1787 came to about 4 billion *livres*, the service of which accounted for about half of the government budget. Yet this was in-line with many European states, including Great Britain. Wherein then, lay the financial crisis that gripped Louis XVI's government at the end of the 1780s?

Accessing the wealth of France

Like most things in history, the answer is far from simple. In basic terms, however, France as a country had more than enough money. The nobility and the bourgeoisie were piloting a relatively dynamic economy that was producing wealth. The problem was that the government could not access this wealth for various structural reasons, foremost was the complicated taxation system with its myriad exemptions. Wealthy bourgeoisie ennobled themselves, dodging taxation. The Church, prosperous though it was, avoided taxation altogether. This problem was compounded by government policies and decisions, such as participation in the American Revolutionary War and the sale of offices. It was the abortive attempts by ministers of the Crown, specifically Calonne, the chief financial minister from 1783 to 1787, to solve this predicament that turned a financial crisis into a political crisis.

Calonne's solution to the problem involved dismantling the system of privilege that insulated the government from the wealth of the



The Seven Years War was a truly global conflict with the French and British fighting in North America, Europe, India and on the high seas.

Jacques Necker (1732–1804)

Necker was a Protestant of Swiss birth who made a fortune as an investor and banker in Paris. By 1777 he had risen to the post of Director General of Finance in Louis XVI's government. His Protestantism and reformism alienated members of the royal family and Catholic members of Louis's cabinet. This enmity saw him dismissed in 1781. He was recalled in 1788 when Calonne and Brienne could not save the French financial system. He was integral in calling the Estates General and determining its composition. His dismissal in 1789 precipitated the storming of the Bastille.



Activity:

Who Pays?

In groups, brainstorm possible solutions to France's financial crisis. List the strengths and weaknesses for each solution. What group in France would be the most affected by each solution?

country at the same time as setting up a methodical tax regime. Calonne proposed that the current system of temporary loans and taxations be replaced by a permanent tax on property from which there would be no exemptions. Provincial assemblies of representative landowners would administer this tax scheme. Not content to simply remodel the tax system, Calonne also sought to increase the overall wealth of the country by embracing the economic philosophies of the **physiocrats** and this meant abandoning the complex system of economic regulation set in motion by the **mercantilist** policies of Jean Baptiste Colbert a hundred years earlier and moving toward free trade, both within the kingdom and with its neighbors. As economically sensible as this ambitious plan may have seemed on paper, it struck at several central tenets of France's political reality. By abolishing tax exemptions, the scheme attacked the noble judges of the *parlements* as well as the entire Second Estate. By proposing representative assemblies, Calonne would subvert the power of the *parlements* themselves. In that these assemblies would essentially collect taxes, they would be a rival to the position of the Farmers-General, a powerful association of men who advanced the crown money in exchange for the right to collect all manner of taxes. If he succeeded in deregulating the economy, the regulating power of the *parlements* would likewise be jeopardized. There were few men of influence and power in 1786 France who would not have been alarmed at what Calonne was proposing.

The **physiocrats** were a group of philosophers in the 18th century who focused on what is now known as economics. In general the *physiocrats* argued for a smaller role for government in the economy and an emphasis on the wealth produced from agriculture as opposed to trade. As such they were opposed to mercantilism and favoured unfettered individualism in economic matters.

Mercantilism is an economic theory that there is only a fixed amount of wealth, as expressed in gold and silver, in the world. Therefore, in an effort to stop gold and silver from flowing out of a country, exports must be maximized and imports minimized. As part of such a strategy, mercantilist countries established colonial empires that could supply the mother country with raw materials.

Discussion point:

When should national debt be avoided?

In principle, national budgets are not that different from household budgets, enumerating obligations and income. In both instances, deficits need to be addressed either by cutting spending, or finding new sources of income (which includes loans).



What do the French Royal budgets of the 1770s and 1790s tell us about government priorities? Examine the budget of your own country. On what is your government spending money?

What are the long-term consequences of financing deficits with credit? Under what circumstances might it be advisable to incur national debt? Why?

How then to avoid the inevitable opposition? If Calonne could somehow find a consensus for change in the nation as a whole he could, quite rightly, claim a degree of legitimacy. There was a body that was capable of such a consensus, the Estates General. An imposing assembly of representatives from all three estates, the Estates General was a body that had not been called for 175 years. Monarchs were loathe to summon it as once called it could prove to be unmanageable. It was, regardless of absolutist theory, a measure of power sharing and as such anathema to the absolutist kings of

France. The monarchy had little control over it once it was called. The members of the estates themselves chose representatives. In 1787, this would have meant a powerful bourgeois delegation bent on concessions from the nobles. There was also a growing number of nobles who wanted a change in the system of government. As we have seen, nobles were involved in all manner of bourgeois concerns, from manufacturing to finance and trade. As Schama has pointed out, a formidable number of these nobles wanted change as well. Bringing these volatile elements together could mean trouble, not only for Calonne's reforms, but also perhaps for the monarchy as a whole.

There was an alternative to the unpredictable Estates General. The monarch had, in the past, called together an Assembly of Notables the members of which were nominated by the crown. This assembly would give the illusion of consultation and the associated legitimacy but in fact, would be easily manipulated by Calonne. In January 1787, 144 notables assembled at Versailles and quickly proved themselves anything but easy to manipulate. Some historians have contended that the notables' hostility had its roots in personal and political antagonism to Calonne himself and the self-interest of the notables themselves, while others believe it to be in the fact that Calonne's reforms were not radical enough. Depending which view one takes, Calonne's Assembly of Notables was either one of the last vestiges of the *ancien régime* or one of the first revolutionary steps. Regardless of the view, by March the notables proclaimed that there was no consensus and this would eventually lead to Calonne's downfall. His replacement, Brienne, fared no better and by May, some of the notables were calling for a more representative body to be called—the **Estates General**.

Brienne was not that desperate, yet. He instead decided to press on with the reforms without the consent of the notables. But that would mean acquiescence of the *parlements* who had to register all new taxes. When it became evident that Brienne had merely traded the obstinance of the notables for the obstinance of the *parlement* of Paris, which refused to register the new taxes, the King exiled the *parlement* in August 1787. As news spread of the *parlement's* stand against unfettered absolutism, supportive crowds gathered in the capital. Its legitimacy slipping away, the Crown resorted to increased censorship, a crackdown on political clubs and the presence of royal troops in the streets in an attempt to restore order and obedience to the Crown. As the tension escalated, so too did calls for the Estates General.

The immediate resort to this ancient yet radical option was almost forestalled by a budding compromise between the Crown and the *parlement*. The Crown for its part would cancel the exile imposed on the *parlements* and remove all new taxes. The *parlement* of Paris would respond by registering the continuation of old taxes. But when, at the end of the session introducing the plan, the King ordered the *parlement* to register the law because it was his will that it be so, the fine balance between royal authority and representative rights was smashed and the *parlement* once again refused. The *parlementary* rebellion spread to *parlements* throughout Louis's realm. Nevertheless, short-term financing was secured. In May of 1788, the *parlement* of Paris made

The Estates General was a representative assembly of the three estates of the *ancien régime*. The Estates General was called together infrequently to advise and aid the monarch in ruling France. Procedurally, each estate had one vote.

clear its constitutional position in regards to the calling of the Estates General as the only body legally capable of authorizing the kind of long-term financing that the crisis required thereby incurring the wrath of the Crown and once again being disbanded. Predictably, *parlements* around the country protested, this time the political protests were joined by popular disturbances throughout France.

By the summer of 1788, the treasury was almost bare, putting the crown's ability to meet its military payroll, among other obligations, in jeopardy. Without the support of the army, and with the *parlements* in open rebellion and the money and stock markets in paralysis, Louis and his government were threatened with the loss of both their monopoly of force and their legitimacy. In a last attempt to inject confidence into the market and the nation, Brienne set a date for the convening of the Estates General and persuaded the King to recall the popular finance minister, Jacques Necker. The Estates General would meet for the first time in 175 years in the spring of 1789.

Far from solving problems or soothing the nation, the call for the Estates General created a whole new set of controversies. As constituted in 1614, the voting procedures of the Estates general reflected the relative privilege of the orders. Each of the three estates would vote as a block. There were, therefore, only three votes in the Estates General. Necker, in the spirit of renewal, released imprisoned journalists and relaxed censorship, with the predictable result—an outpouring of broadsheets and pamphlets attacking the proposed voting system and those who defended it. Ironically it was the *parlements* that bore the brunt of this criticism, the same body that had been popular heroes in their call for the Estates General. Even when the King announced, in December 1788, that the representation of delegates from the Third Estate would be doubled, it did not soothe the masses, for he would not concede to a one delegate, one vote process. So while the calling of the Estates General seemed to mark the regime as amenable to the possibility of change, in reality it had only postponed the question that was central to that change. Would the delegates, and by extension the people they represented, be thought of as individuals or as a group.

The Estates General

In order to help guide the deliberations of the Estates General, the King ordered that the representatives of each estate in each of the representative districts should compile lists of grievances and proposals for change. These **cahiers** on one hand were as varied as the localities that produced them, but certain patterns do emerge in this rich historical record. The Clerical *cahiers* reflected the disenchantment of the impoverished parish priests. The nobility, especially those from urban areas, were actually quite enlightened in their *cahiers* and in fact many members of the Second Estate argued that the Estates General should sit permanently, to speak for the nation, though they still balked at the thought of voting by head. Whereas the nobility saw the Estates General as a method of curtailing the power of the monarchy, the *cahiers* of the Third Estate reveal that the mass of the population looked to Louis as a protector of their traditional rights *vis à vis* the nobility. The *cahiers* reveal a King who still enjoyed a great deal of popular support.

The **cahiers** were compilations of grievances generated by each of the three estates throughout France. They were intended to guide the discussions in the Estates General.

Activity:**Interpreting *Cahiers*
Cahiers of the Nobility of Blois**

Art. I. *In order to assure the exercise of this first and most sacred of the rights of man, we ask that no citizen may be exiled, arrested or held prisoner except in cases contemplated by the law and in accordance with a decree originating in the regular courts of justice.*

That in case the States General determine that provisional detention may be necessary at times, it ought to be ordained that every person so arrested shall be delivered, within twenty-four hours into the hand of appropriate judges, to be judged with the least possible delay, in conformity with the laws of the kingdom; that evocations be abolished, and that no extraordinary commission be established in any instance; finally that no person be deprived of his position, civil or military, without judgment in due form.

From the right of personal liberty arises the right to write, to think, to print and to publish, with the names of authors and publishers, all kinds of complaints and reflections upon public and private affairs, limited by the right of every citizen to seek in the established courts legal redress against author or publisher, in case of defamation or injury; limited also by all restrictions which the States General may see fit to impose in that which concerns morals and religion.

We indicate further a number of instances in which natural liberty is abridged:

- 1 *The abuse of police regulations, which every year, in an arbitrary manner and without regular process, thrusts a number of artisans and useful citizens into prisons, work-houses and places of detention, often for trivial faults and even upon simple suspicion;*
- 2 *The abuse of exclusive privileges which fetter industry;*
- 3 *The guilds and corporations which deprive citizens of the right of using their faculties;*
- 4 *The regulations governing manufactures, the rights of inspection and marque, which impose restrictions that have lost their usefulness, and which burden industry with a tax that yields no profit to the treasury.*

Cahiers of The Third Estate of Dourdon

The order of the third estate of the City, Bailliage, and County of Dourdan, imbued with gratitude prompted by the paternal kindness of the King, who deigns to restore its former rights and its former constitution, forgets at this moment its misfortunes and impotence, to harken only to its foremost duty, that of sacrificing everything to the glory of the Patrie and the service of His Majesty. It supplicates him to accept the grievances, complaints, and remonstrances which it is permitted to bring to the foot of the throne, and to see therein only the expression of its zeal and the homage of its obedience.

It wishes:

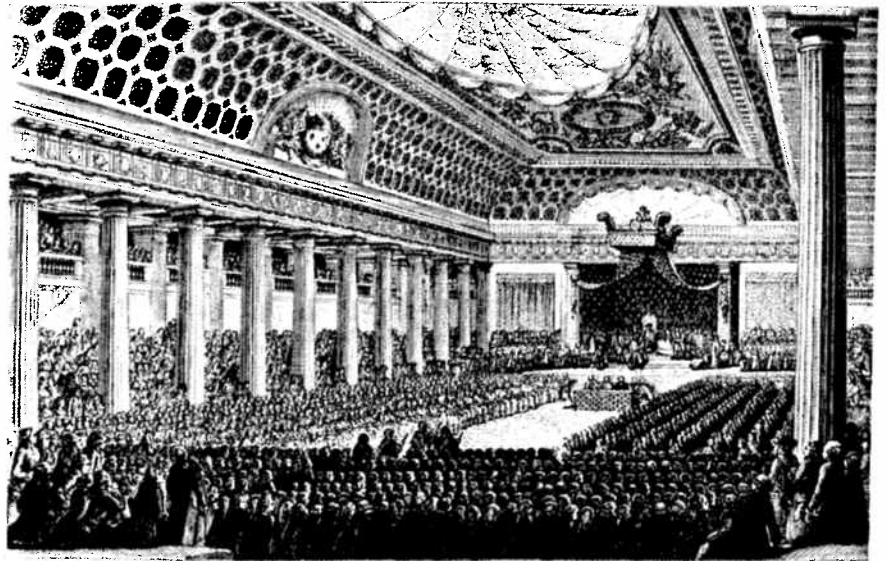
- 1 *That his subjects of the third estate, equal by such status to all other citizens, present themselves before the common father without other distinction which might degrade them.*
- 2 *That all the orders, already united by duty and a common desire to contribute equally to the needs of the State, also deliberate in common concerning its needs.*
- 3 *That no citizen lose his liberty except according to law; that, consequently, no one be arrested by virtue of special orders, or, if imperative circumstances necessitate such orders, that the prisoner be handed over to the regular courts of justice within forty-eight hours at the latest.*
- 4 *That no letters or writings intercepted in the post [mails] be the cause of the detention of any citizen, or be produced in court against him, except in case of conspiracy or undertaking against the State.*
- 5 *That the property of all citizens be inviolable, and that no one be required to make sacrifice thereof for the public welfare, except upon assurance of indemnification based upon the statement of freely selected appraisers. ...*
- 15 *That every personal tax be abolished; that thus the capitation and the taille and its accessories be merged with the vingtiemes in a tax on land and real or nominal property.*
- 16 *That such tax be borne equally, without distinction, by all classes of citizens and by all kinds of property, even feudal and contingent rights.*
- 17 *That the tax substituted for the corvee be borne by all classes of citizens equally and without distinction. That said tax, at present beyond the capacity of those who pay it and the needs to which it is destined, be reduced by at least one-half. ...*

Source: <http://www.historyguide.org>.

Source-based questions

- 1 What evidence is there in these documents that the nobility drew income from non-traditional sources?
- 2 Compare and contrast the views of the monarchy as expressed in these two documents.
- 3 Using these documents and other resources, discuss the relationship between the grievances of the Second and Third Estate and the principles of the Enlightenment.

As the *cahiers* were prepared and elections were held throughout the winter of 1789, the social composition of the coming Estates General came into sharper focus. The realm was divided into 234 electoral districts, electing two representatives for each of the first and second estates and the Third Estate electing four. From the end of April they gathered in Paris for the opening ceremonies to be held on 5 May at Versailles.



The meeting of the Estates General was a grand affair accompanied by much ritual and ceremony. Many of these ceremonies, the clothing, and even the seating in the Estates General were designed to reinforce the social structure that the National Assembly would eventually overthrow.

Once these ceremonies had concluded, voting rights remained a key issue. The first two estates immediately declared that they were committed to voting by order. The Third Estate took a little more time to solidify their position, but emerged by the end of the first week as dedicated to voting by head. While there was some effort to achieve a compromise it was short-lived. Leadership at this point was not forthcoming from the King and the Estates General seemed moribund shortly after its birth. It took three poor priests from the provinces to quicken it. They sat with the Third Estate on the morning of June 13. By the end of the week nearly 100 priests who had decided to make common cause with the Third Estate had joined these three. When these priests were added to the nobles who had stood for election from the Third Estate rather than the first, men such as the Comte de Mirabeau, this group could rightly claim to have representatives from all the orders of France, that they in fact represented the nation as a whole. As such they named the body the **National Assembly**. As significant as that was, in the next motion they declared that all taxes were invalidated unless approved by the National Assembly—in essence declaring themselves to be the legitimate government of France.

The King and his government faced the age-old issue confronting all governments—how to make their subjects obey. Unable in the short term and at least partially unwilling to resort to force, Louis decided to rely on the legitimacy of his position. He would insist on a compromise and rely on the force of this insistence to carry the day. When the delegates of the National Assembly found themselves locked out of their meeting chamber, ostensibly because of preparations for the royal pronouncement, they repaired to a



How can ruling elites use ritual and costume as a form of propaganda?

Activity:

The Estates General

The reality of France's social composition was far more complex than the division into three estates would suggest. Research the Estates General and its composition:

- What social groups represented each estate?
- To what extent did the social composition of the representatives of each estate exclude elements in French society? What significance might this have for the future of the Revolution?

National Assembly This was the first revolutionary government in France. It was originally formed out of representatives of each of the three estates in June 1789. This would be the form of government until it was overthrown in August 1792.

Activity:**The opening of the Estates General**

Political ceremonies and ritual are generally designed for a specific purpose. Research paintings and accounts of the opening of the Estates General in 1789.

- Describe the seating and ceremony at the opening.
- What was the political and social significance of the seating and ritual at the opening?
- Why do you think the ceremony and seating was designed in this way?

Research the following political rituals. Analyse the purpose of each ritual and how it reflected the goals and principles of the regime that designed it.

- The coronation of Napoleon I
- The proclamation of the German Empire, 1871
- The State Opening of the UK Parliament, November 2009
- The Nuremberg Rally, 1936

tennis court a few blocks away. Before the gathering of representatives on the tennis court, the deputies took an oath, known as the Tennis Court Oath, to continue to meet until a written constitution had been approved by a majority of their members. At this point nothing the King could have said short of declaring the National Assembly a sovereign body could have assuaged the deputies or the growing mobs in the streets of Versailles and Paris.

So, following a profound lack of leadership on the part of Louis XVI, a series of half-steps failed to please either side and served to alienate the National Assembly even further. The King adopted a contradictory approach that at the very least confused those upon whom he might have counted for support. Although he did, on Necker's advice, propose a set of sound solutions to the issues facing the nation, he also summoned 20,000 troops to Versailles—a clear threat to the National Assembly and its supporters in the streets. Nevertheless he still allowed the National Assembly to meet without explicitly siding with the nobility in the dispute. If this confusing stance was frustrating to the deputies of the National Assembly, it was even more disturbing to the growing crowds in the streets. It was to the King that they looked to safeguard them against the nobility. In fact, the French monarchy had a long history of confronting the nobility. When Louis summoned troops to Paris and did not support the National Assembly against the Second Estate, many felt betrayed and driven to more radical positions. They saw the King becoming a puppet of the nobility and as such hostile to the principles for which the fledgling National Assembly stood. These principles hinged on the notion that France was more than the property of the King, that it belonged to all those who called themselves French. It belonged to the **nation**.

Discussion point:

Legitimacy and force continue to be important elements in the ability of a government to rule.



How does your government establish legitimacy? To what extent does it use force to govern?

Nation/Nationalism A nation is a group of people who share a number of commonalities that generally include language, culture, historical development, and land or territory. Nationalism is an emotional attachment to this group of people and its desire for political independence.

To the Bastille

Louis XVI's inaction bought time for the deputies of the National Assembly. They spent it attempting to fulfill the terms of the Tennis Court Oath, writing a constitution. While the Assembly got down to business, popular disturbances continued to plague both the capital and the countryside. Mobs vandalized shops, and local police forces such as they were, were powerless to control them. These disturbances were not simply statements of political outrage and fear. They were, in many ways, extensions of the bread riots

that had been disrupting French life since the spring. Prices had been increasing throughout the country and, as they had done for centuries, the French peasantry, to whom the price of bread was a matter of great importance, took to the streets to show their hunger, to intimidate bakers and in extreme cases, take what they could not afford to buy. In an effort to protect themselves from unruly elements real and imagined, towns, cities and individual citizens began arming themselves. They were not the only ones arming themselves, the number of troops, both French and foreign, massing around the capital and Versailles were increasing drastically. It was becoming clear to observers, both in the assembly and in the streets that these troops were being summoned as a means for the monarchy to regain control and disband the National Assembly.

These suspicions gained credence when, on 11 July, on the advice of conservative noble elements including his wife and brother, the King dismissed Necker whom they blamed for unleashing this tempest by means of his reforms. As news of Necker's dismissal spread and unrest began to increase in size and intensity, some of the foreign troops were called into the capital to restore order, accelerating the fear in the streets. On 12–13 July the unrest gained direction and strength attacking a number of locations of royal authority, real and symbolic, looking for arms and ammunition. On 14 July the search led them to the **Invalides** where they found weapons. Eventually a crowd gathered at the **Bastille**, the great symbol of royal authority in Paris. After a tense stand off in which shots were exchanged, the governor of the Bastille understood the hopelessness of his situation and surrendered the fortress, having his head paraded around on a pike for his troubles.

On learning of the popular affront to his authority, Louis made ready to use the forces he had been gathering in anticipation of just such an occasion. His military commanders, however, were unsure that their troops could be trusted to obey orders to attack the Parisians, especially in light of the performance of the soldiers in front of the

Invalides A military hospital and armoury built by Louis XIV.

The Bastille A fortress and prison in Paris. Before the Revolution it had gained a reputation, only partially true, for harsh treatment and torture. In the *ancien régime* the king and nobility could have a member of the Third Estate imprisoned without trial. As such the Bastille came to symbolize the absolute power of the king.

Discussion point: Peaceful protest



The photographs above are from the same protest that involved peaceful and violent episodes. While protest is a key element to modern democratic activity most governments agree that the right to



gather in protest has its limits. What do you think these limits should be?



Is the government ever justified in using force on protestors? If so, when and why?

Bastille. Louis had now lost the second vital element in the ability of any government to rule. Having already lost a good deal of his legitimacy to the National Assembly, it now appeared that he had lost his monopoly of force to the mob of Paris.

Activity:

Storming the Bastille

The following is an account written by Thomas Jefferson, an American diplomat in Paris, describing early accounts of the storming of the Bastille.

De Corney advised the people then to retire, retired himself, and the people took possession of the arms. It was remarkable that not only the Invalids themselves made no opposition, but that a body of 5,000 foreign troops, encamped within 400 yards, never stirred.

Monsieur de Corny and five others were then sent to ask arms of Monsieur de Launai, Governor of the Bastille.

They found a great collection of people already before the place, and they immediately planted a flag of truce, which was answered by a like flag hoisted on the parapet.

The deputation prevailed on the people to fall back a little, advanced themselves to make their demand of the Governor, and in that instant a discharge from the Bastille killed four people of those nearest to the deputies. The deputies retired, the people rushed against the place, and almost in an instant were in possession of a fortification, defended by 100 men, of infinite strength, which in other times had stood several regular sieges and had never been taken. How they got in,

has as yet been impossible to discover. Those, who pretend to have been of the party tell so many different stories as to destroy the credit of them all.

Source: Thomas Jefferson, quoted in Boyd, Julian. (ed.) 1958. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol.15. Princeton University Press. Also available at "The Beginning of the French Revolution, 1789". <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com>.

Research other primary and secondary source accounts of the storming of the Bastille. Compare and contrast their accounts of:

- The number of participants
- The social class of the participants
- The level of violence
- The goals of the Parisians
- The aftermath of the storming.

Write a newspaper article based on your research.

With the citizens of Paris in the ascendance, the forces of conservatism in France began to flee. This included members of the royal household all the way down to the newly ennobled, all fearful of their fortunes, privilege and lives. These well-heeled refugees became known as the *émigrés* and would spread their fear to the nobles of neighbouring countries. As events in France accelerated throughout the spring and early summer of 1789, other European powers paid closer attention. Foreign reaction to these early stages of the Revolution was varied.

The days immediately following the storming of the Bastille were a whirlwind of activity. The King announced that he would order the troops surrounding the capital to disperse. By 17 July he had come to the capital to address the newly formed city council with its newly elected mayor, a position that had not hitherto existed in Paris. A citizens' guard had been formed with the Marquis de Lafayette, the self-promoting noble who had gained fame in the American Revolution, at its head.

Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834)

Lafayette was a reform-minded aristocrat who had fought in the American Revolution and been deeply influenced by its principles. He was a member of the Assembly of Notables and later the National Assembly. After the storming of the Bastille he was appointed to the command of the National Guard. As the Revolution radicalized, he ran foul of both the Royalists and the radicals. His heavy handed attempts to maintain order and secure a place for the monarchy alienated many in Paris and he was widely held to be complicit in the massacre at the Champ de Mars in 1790 especially by his enemies in the Jacobin Club. Lafayette fled France and was captured by the Austrians and held in prison until his release in 1797.



Many moderate reformers, hoped that this was the Revolution begun and ended. The King's absolute authority had been replaced by a body representing the nation. A citizens' army, one born out of civic obligation and duty rather than royal whim and mercenary needs, was in its infancy. The Assembly was hard at work on a written constitution that would formalize all these gains. But, as with most legislation, the devil is in the details. There would emerge in the days and weeks following deeply divided opinion on the form that this new state would take. These difficulties were compounded by the fact that the problems that in large part gave rise to the riots culminating in the storming of the *Bastille* were unsolved. Bread prices were still high and many of the deputies of the Assembly ideologically favoured a deregulated grain trade, which would allow prices to fluctuate with the market, a measure that would certainly push bread prices higher. The King's concessions did not immediately restore order in the capital or the rest of the country. Roaming mobs, and occasionally units of the new National Guard took retribution on those whom they thought were not sufficiently supportive of their goals. As elusive as public order was in the capital, the situation in the provinces was worse, compounded as it was by distance from the new government in Paris. Wild rumours of plots and counterplots fuelled a situation made all the more volatile by the breakdown of regular law and order. What had started as a reaction to spreading bread riots now bordered on panic that what gains that had been made in Paris would now be undone—**The Great Fear**. The National Assembly had an enormous task. It had to re-establish governmental authority in the country without any clear idea of what that authority would look like while at the same time seeing to the day-to-day mechanics of running a vast state of 30 million people.

The Great Fear A period in the early Revolution during which, in the absence of a strong central authority, towns and villages armed themselves to guard their property and grain supplies against roaming mobs. The rumour about counter-revolution also increased tension throughout the country.

While they wrestled with the banal aspects of governance such as feeding the population and keeping public order, the deputies of the National Assembly sought the root cause of these issues. Most would have agreed that in one form or another it was the system of privilege that bound the *ancien régime*. On 4 August nobles and clergy alike began relinquishing feudal privileges. This led to an orgy of renunciation, with deputies trying to outdo each other in their self-sacrifice, while making certain that the sacrifice was not theirs alone. Noble dues and church taxes were swept away. Venal offices and privileges were eliminated. The net result was the abolition of feudalism in France, but not in the sweeping manner that many in the streets and countryside had expected and indeed wanted. As mentioned, the deputies in the National Assembly were drawn from the nobility, the clergy and most numerous from the bourgeoisie, a social class that in general had a respect for the sanctity of property. Venal offices, hunting rights, feudal dues were all seen as some form of property and by the time this altruism had made its way into a decree, all of this relinquished property was to be compensated by the state.

The King to Paris

Louis was in a strange limbo as to his own authority and power. While the events of July seemed to place authority in the hands of the National Assembly, the country still hung on how Louis

would receive the August decrees and more importantly the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was the principles of the Revolution drafted into the form of a constitution. It was designed to set out the general principles that would guide the drafting of the more comprehensive constitution. The general principles embodied in this document were:

- equality before the law
- freedom of religion
- freedom of the press
- rights of *habeus corpus*
- equality of taxation
- law as an activity of the nation, not the King
- accountability for public officials.

The Declaration was necessarily broad in its wording. The precise nature of the new state, the actual constitution, was yet to be decided. Vital to these questions were debates in the Assembly as to what the power of the monarch was to be in the new France. Should he have anything but symbolic power? Should he have a veto that allowed him to delay laws, but not strike them down, or should he have a complete veto? While these debates were going on, Louis acted as though there had been no change in his status. He accepted some of the reforms of August, though not all, and he vacillated on accepting the Declaration of Rights. As would become more and more common, those who thought they were in charge were overtaken by events as they erupted in the streets.

Activity:

Are all declarations created equal?

The struggle of Britain's thirteen North American colonies for independence had a profound effect on the causes, personalities, and principles of the French Revolution. The founding documents of both the United States of America and the French Revolution were styled as declarations. Review the extracts below.

Declaration of Independence

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness ... The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world. ...

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. ...

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. ...

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers. He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance. ...

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to civil power. ...

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: ...

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing taxes on us without our consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury: ...



The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

Approved by the National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789.

The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, ... Therefore the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and of the citizen, Articles:

- 1** *Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.*
- 2** *The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.*
- 3** *The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.*
- 4** *Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law. ...*
- 6** *Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.*
- 7** *No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. ...*
- 9** *As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty ...*
- 10** *No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.*
- 11** *The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law. ...*
- 12** *A common contribution [tax] is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means.*
- 13** *All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally or by their representatives, as to the necessity of the public contribution [tax]; to grant this freely; to know to what uses it is put; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of the taxes.*
- 14** *Society has the right to require of every public agent an account of his administration. ...*
- 15** *Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.*

Source-based questions

- 1** Compare and contrast the two declarations according to the following areas:
 - Rights
 - Responsibilities
 - Over-all tone
- 2** What evidence is there that the documents were influenced by Enlightenment principles?
- 3** With reference to their origin and purpose, discuss the values and of these documents to historians studying principles guiding the French Revolution.

Grandiose proclamations, promulgations, and protestations had done nothing to bring down the price of bread and this age-old issue brought unrest to the streets of the country as it always had done. The women of Paris were the face of that unrest. Their role as keepers of the household and its finances meant that they confronted the price of bread on a daily basis. As an autumn of want seemed to presage a winter of famine, some 6,000 women of Paris rose on 5 October 1789 and rampaged through the capital before setting off

for Versailles to express their concern to both the National Assembly and the king himself. The events of October 1789, after a good deal of high drama, culminated in the royal household and the National Assembly being forcibly relocated to the capital (in essence making it a true national capital). Again, all this begged the question as to who or what exactly was in charge of France.

Declaration of Rights and other constitutions, 1789–91

As bread prices settled down, the National Assembly continued its work in turning the principles of the Declaration of Rights into a detailed document that would provide a workable theory of governance. The comprehensiveness of these changes is often overshadowed by the radicalism of those that followed, but the changes wrought by the National Assembly would touch all aspects of French life. The administration of religious life was to be no exception.

It is important to remember that the clergy, especially members of the lower clerical orders, had been involved in all aspects of the Revolution. They had broken ranks with their estate to sit as individuals in the National Assembly. They had been the first to renounce their privileges on the night of 4 August. They had been instrumental in drafting the Declaration of Rights. When the National Assembly turned its attention to the official role of the Church in the new French state many clergy who had been leaders in the new order would find themselves fighting rear-guard actions to protect the Catholic Church in France.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy was designed to bring the principles of the Revolution to matters of faith. To that end the size of the clergy was reduced to only those who actually administered to parishioners, eliminating friars, monks, nuns and the like who did not have direct contact with church goers. The land that belonged to these convents and monasteries was to be forfeited to the state. The state would accept the responsibility of paying the clergy to ensure principles of equality were observed and the church would cease to be an avenue of enrichment. The Pope would retain all authority on matters spiritual, but not administrative. The Assembly considered, however, the appointment of clergy to be an administrative task and sought to apply the principle of popular election to this office as it had all other offices of state. When this was coupled with the idea of equality it meant that non-practising Catholics, Protestants and Jews would have a say in choosing the clergy. Even the more reform-minded of the clergy began to balk at this provision. Likewise, it became a rallying point for the most radical of the members of the National Assembly, representing a litmus test for the sovereignty of the Assembly. They had determined that they would not be dictated to by their own monarch, but how could they bow to the will, or even acknowledge the authority of a foreign power—the Pope? These deputies and eventually a majority of the members of the Assembly decided that devotion to the new order had to be explicit and devised an oath to test that devotion.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy
This was a document which brought the Catholic Church in France under the authority of the National Assembly. Among other things it confiscated church property and appointed priests by popular vote. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy essentially replaced the Pope with the National Assembly as the head of the Church.

Pope Pius VI for his part advised the faithful of the French clergy that to take the oath meant to forsake the true church. In any event, the oath and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy divided the Revolution. It was deeply unpopular among the majority of the Third Estate. It served to drive Catholic worship underground, thereby creating an enforcement headache for the Assembly.

In theory the Civil Constitution of the Clergy would help solve another root cause of the Revolution—the financial crisis, which did not evaporate with the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Confiscated Church land would be used to back a new form of paper currency called **assignats**, that could then be used to pay of government debt. The problem became evident when hard currency such as gold and silver became increasingly scarce—many hoarding it as a hedge against even more unstable times ahead or a life in exile. The result was that the government had to print more and more assignats with predictable inflationary results.

As the Tennis Court Oath had stipulated, the primary duty of the National Assembly was to draft a constitution, a duty that took the better part of two years. Debates raged over the position of the monarchy, the relative merits of bicameral and unicameral structures, separation of powers, and voting qualifications. As the deliberations went on, the shape of the new state began to emerge. Decentralization was the central theme. The deputies wished to create a system in which no one person or even one group of people could become too powerful. There would be strict separation of powers. The King as the head of the executive branch of government could appoint ministers, but these ministers could be removed by the legislative branch. The king could use his veto to delay legislation for a maximum of three years. The Legislative Assembly was to be chosen through a system of indirect elections, in which the ultimate office holder had to pay significant taxes, and the participants in the decision-making process—the basic voter as an “active citizen”—could be far less wealthy. Citizens would also elect all local office holders and administrative positions. The administrative map of the country was also overhauled. France was divided into 83 roughly equal departments each self-governing through a complex system of subdivisions and elections.

Political clubs

Political life in France during the years 1789 to 1791 was increasingly dominated by the presence of a dizzying array of what have become known as political clubs—the Jacobin Club, the Cordeliers Club, the Feuillants Club and many others. These were groups of citizens who gathered to discuss the form and substance of the newly emerging France. These clubs were essentially local groups though as the Revolution moved forward they also debated national issues. As their interests diversified, they also began affiliating into wider bodies. The most famous, and increasingly the most powerful, was the Jacobin Club, so named for the abandoned Paris monastery where it had initially met. By 1790, the Jacobin Club had roughly 1,200 members in the capital and affiliated clubs throughout the country, its deliberations keenly watched and reported. The Jacobin Club became an important

Assignats Paper money issued by the National Assembly. Their value was backed by confiscated Church lands. However, they were continually devalued as the Assembly and later the Convention printed more and more *assignats* as their financial needs increased.

Discussion point:

To what extent is it possible for governments to dictate belief? Is there a difference between dictating religious practice and religious belief?

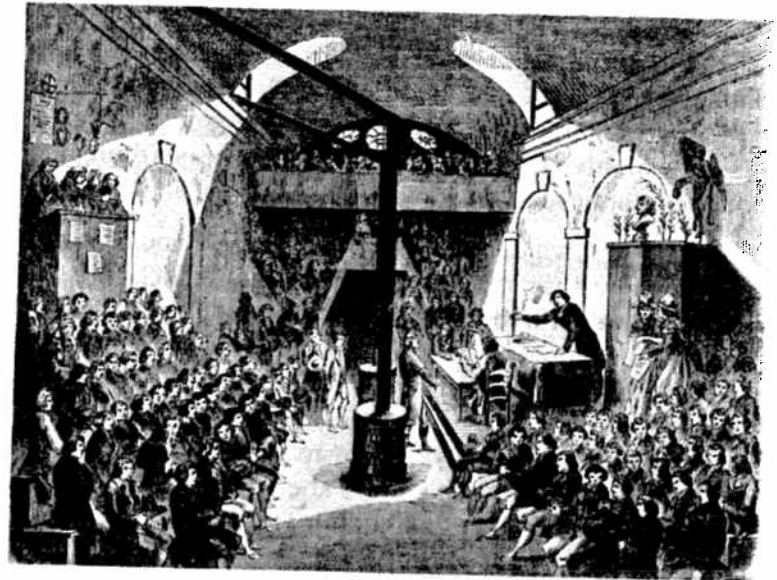
Activity:

Political clubs

Research one of the following revolutionary clubs/factions. Produce a political pamphlet to promote it.

- The Mountain
- The Plain
- Cordelier Club
- The Jacobin Club
- The Girondins
- The Feuillant Club

shaper of public opinion and a place where the politically ambitious could gain a national stage. Over time, the Jacobin Club itself would be fragmented into other political groupings with more conservative elements by turns breaking off, forming other clubs such as the *Feuillants*, leaving a radical core. Radical revolutionary leaders such as Maximilien Robespierre, Georges Danton, Camille Desmoulins, Jacques-Pierre Brissot and Jean-Paul Marat were all members of the Jacobin Club at some point and became important leaders during the Terror.



The Jacobin Club was one of the most radical of a number of political clubs that developed prior to and during the Revolution. "Jacobinism" became an imprecise term used throughout Europe during and after the Revolution to label radical, often republican political views.

The flight to Varennes, 1791

The sovereignty of Louis XVI essentially ended when the women of Paris compelled him and his family to return with them to Paris. After his return to Paris, he publicly acquiesced to proposals presented by the National Assembly and played the role that the Assembly cast for him. Privately, however, he wanted no part of the Revolution and although he was astute enough to actively and sincerely dissuade his brother, the Comte d'Artois, from launching a counter-revolution from abroad, he became increasingly sceptical of his future role in the new France. For example, his acceptance of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was for public consumption as he still practised Catholicism with priests who had not taken the oath. When incidents such as this were reported, as they inevitably were, they served to reinforce the public's perception that there were many conspiratorial dealings to which the king and his Austrian wife were party. When Louis and his family tried to leave Paris to spend time at their chateau in Saint-Cloud, the Parisian mob physically stopped them and they had to return to the Tuileries Palace in Paris. It was becoming evident to Louis that he and his family were prisoners of the Revolution and he began to formulate a plan of escape. On 20 June 1791 Louis and his family slipped out of Paris in disguise. The plan depended on the help of a number of co-conspirators including the Swede Count Axel von Fersen and the French nobleman, Louis Auguste le Tonnelier de Breteuil. The royals' identity and plot were discovered soon enough and they were stopped in the town of Varennes. The flight to Varennes was an important event in the radicalization of the Revolution. Even though Louis did not realize it, until June 1791 he enjoyed a degree of public support. His private actions including the private religious practice and an ill-informed military banquet in which the King and Queen were reported to have participated in denigrating the Revolution and its leaders, squandered what public support the King still had.

The Flight to Varennes presented a very serious problem for the National Assembly. The deputies had spent two years crafting a constitution in which the King played a significant role. It was now evident that he could not be trusted and that he held all this work in



Can you find specific instances when the terms "Jacobin" was used outside of France?

contempt, a contempt that the Flight to Varennes had now made embarrassingly public. In a feeble effort to preserve the new constitution, the Assembly endorsed a fiction in which the King and his family had been kidnapped by counter-revolutionary forces from whom the vigilant citizens of Varennes had rescued them. The reality, lost on no one, was that the King was no friend of the Revolution. From June 1791, Louis XVI would have no hand in shaping the Revolution. This also put the new constitution itself in grave danger even before it had been formally adopted.

War, 1792

The reaction of the rest of Europe to the developments in France was anything but predictable and opinion was varied. Early in the Revolution British sentiment seemed to side with the revolutionaries who appeared on their way to a French version of the Glorious Revolution. The Hapsburg Emperor Joseph, though concerned for the fate of his sister, the French Queen, and lobbied by the growing numbers of *émigré* nobility, was not overly troubled to see unrest in France weaken his rival strategically. The same sentiment seemed to be shared by the other European rulers. To the nationalist movements in Poland and Belgium the weakened France could offer little more than an example.

Nevertheless the events in France soon began to cause concern among European rulers. The confinement of the royal family in Paris and the aborted flight to Varennes seemed to suggest the King was a prisoner of his subjects and this was a concern to all monarchs. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy alienated the Pope and the Catholic monarchs. As pamphlets and other revolutionary literature that poured out of France became more radical, the spectre of republicanism began to haunt intellectual discourse. The flow of *émigrés* continued unabated, and in fact increased. These *émigrés* brought with them warnings of the consequences of constitutionalism run amok.

By July of 1791, Joseph's successor, Leopold, decided to act, albeit tentatively. He called on his fellow monarchs to join him on a crusade to restore the French monarchy.



This image depicts the arrest of the royal family in Varennes. Despite its ultimate failure, the flight could have worked. The vast majority of the French population had never laid eyes on their monarch and thus it was entirely plausible that he could have passed undetected through France to the border.



How was the flight to Varennes a turning point in the Revolution?

Activity:

Foreign reaction: going deeper

Both popular and official sentiment regarding the Revolution was divided in the other major European powers, especially early in the Revolution. For each of the following major powers develop arguments for and against intervening to save the monarchy in France.

Power	Arguments for intervention	Arguments against intervention
United Kingdom		
Prussia		
Russia		
Austria		

Only the King of Prussia responded to the call, and that was only by way of agreeing to a meeting at Pilnitz at the end of the summer. The Declaration of Pilnitz was no more solid. It proclaimed concern for what was going on in France and issued vague threats that neither Austria nor Prussia could really carry out.

The emptiness of these threats, however, was lost on many revolutionaries within France.

There grew among some of them, notably Brissot and a new faction within the Jacobin movement known as the Girondins, an obsession with visions of *émigré* armies returning to wreak vengeance on the revolutionaries. The issue of war split the Jacobin Party with a number of prominent members such as Robespierre arguing against war.

There seemed a willingness to go to war on the part of Louis and the royalists as well. Throughout the rest of 1791 and the beginning of 1792, the voices advocating caution were overrun by a combination of patriotic fervour and fear of foreign invaders. In April 1792, the King announced to the National Assembly that France was at war with Austria. Prussia soon joined her Austrian ally.

Jacques-Pierre Brissot (1754–1793)

Brissot was a moderate revolutionary who was elected to both the National Assembly and the Convention. As a member of the Jacobin Club he argued for war with Austria and shortly thereafter Great Britain, but later decried the associated radical violence that erupted within France. He became a leading figure in the Gironde faction and was eventually expelled from the Jacobin Club. After the Gironde was defeated by the Mountain faction, Brissot was arrested, tried and executed.



From a constitutional monarchy to a republic, 1792

The flight to Varennes brought into the light of day those revolutionaries who had previously kept republican aspirations to themselves, among them Danton, Desmoulins and Robespierre. When they put these ideas into writing and called for a mass demonstration on the Champs de Mars on 17 July 1791 it was met with the musket fire of the National Guard scattering the champions of republicanism and silencing them for a time. Throughout the autumn and winter of 1791–2, the Assembly increasingly turned to elements of martial law to keep control in the streets, rife as they were with rumours of plots and counter plots and the growing pressure of rising bread prices.

The declaration of war in April 1792 again radicalized the population. War frequently puts pressure on prices. When this was combined with the already precarious state of the poorest French citizens and the near collapse of the *assignats*, unrest flowed through the streets of Paris and other urban centres. By the summer it was clear that the war was not going well for France. The Duke of Brunswick, the Prussian commander issued what became known as the **Brunswick Manifesto** proclaiming a terrible fate for the entire French capital should anything happen to the royal family. This resulted in a patriotic swell that identified the King and Queen as a key threat to the survival of the Revolution. Republican sentiments, expressed in tracts, speeches, and posters, escalated dramatically during the summer of 1792.

Discussion point:

Robespierre opposed the war on a number of grounds. He declared that he believed the proposed war to be counter-revolutionary. What do you think he meant by this?



What were the arguments for and against war in 1792?

Brunswick Manifesto Proclamation of the Duke of Brunswick, the commander of the Prussian forces attacking France in 1792, that if the revolutionaries did not restore the King and his family to their previous position of authority and freedom, the Prussian forces would raze the city of Paris.

On 10 August 1792, mobs in Paris, egged on by Marat, Danton, and other Jacobins, attacked the palace in which the royal family was housed. At the same time revolutionaries stormed the meeting place of the municipal Parisian government and abolished it, setting up a Revolutionary Commune which immediately abolished the National Assembly and proclaimed a new national government called the National Convention to be elected by universal male suffrage. In many ways the radical Jacobins, men such as Danton, Robespierre, Marat, and Hébert, used their influence with the Commune to pressure the more representative, and on the whole less radical, National Assembly and later National Convention to radicalize the Revolution. Though the Convention repeatedly resisted such moves, it nevertheless highlights the precarious nature of the new government.

The insurrection of 10 August 1792 was not enough to assuage the fear of Paris citizens, especially those who now collectively referred to themselves as *sans culottes* (literally “without breeches”), the tradesmen, artisans, and urban working poor who wished to distinguish themselves from the bourgeoisie and aristocracy (who wore knee breeches). As the Prussian army advanced on Paris and with the Brunswick Manifesto still ringing in their ears, mobs of frightened Parisians, again encouraged by radicals, particularly Marat, stormed the overflowing prisons of the capital and butchered the priests, nobles and their associates imprisoned there. In the end some 1,300 prisoners were murdered. These September Massacres posed an important question for the new government: who was in charge? If a functioning, stable government needs legitimacy and a monopoly of force to govern, the September Massacres exposed a dangerous weakness in the Convention and Commune. These bodies may have enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy, especially in Paris, but if mobs continued to take the law into their own hands, how could they claim to possess a monopoly of force? Over the next few months the National Convention would establish such a monopoly and build for itself the apparatus of massacre.

The newly formed National Convention in one of its first acts abolished the French monarchy,

Jean Paul Marat (1744–1793)

Trained as a doctor, Marat earned his reputation as an early revolutionary radical through his fiery speeches and journalism. A member of both the Cordeliers and Jacobin Clubs, his oratory could whip the population into a fury as it did in the period leading up to the September Massacres. Essentially a populist, Marat was inflexible in his calls for the death of the king, the danger of the *émigrés* and the use of terror. He was elected to the Convention, but was put on trial when his extremism alarmed the Girondins when they held sway. His acquittal was a sign that the Revolution was radicalizing. Marat was assassinated by Charlotte Corday as he sat in a bath.



Georges Danton (1759–1794)

Danton was a Parisian lawyer who became active in local politics after the Revolution broke out. He was active in both the Cordeliers Club, of which he was a founding member, and increasingly in the Jacobin Club. He played a role in the overthrow of the monarchy in August 1792. He would serve as the Republic's first Minister of Justice, a deputy to the National Convention, and as the first chairman of the Committee of Public Safety. During this time Danton feuded bitterly with Brissot and the Girondin faction. As Robespierre spurred on revolutionary terror, Danton sought to curb it and was eventually branded a moderate. He was arrested in March 1794 and his trial was a public sensation, but, despite rallying the gathered throngs, he was dutifully found guilty and executed.



inaugurating the first French Republic. The Convention duly drafted a new Republican constitution, but immediately suspended it in October 1793 at the urging of the Mountain, a radical Jacobin faction, so named for their habit of sitting in the highest seats in the Convention until the war was won. It did not take long for the radicals to call for Louis XVI to be put on trial for treason against the French people. While the ensuing trial and verdict may have been a foregone conclusion, the sentence was not. It was no small matter to kill a king. Nevertheless, by the slimmest of majorities and amid the protests of the Girondins, the Convention voted that the former King of France should die on the **guillotine**, and on 21 January 1793 he did. This radicalization of the Revolution meant that the Girondin faction of the Jacobin Club, the faction that led France into the war and with much of its support in departments outside of Paris, was eclipsed by the more radical Mountain faction, with its support in the Paris mob. The pendulum of Revolution now dictated that the previously radical Girondins were now the moderates, a moniker that would soon become very dangerous.

The guillotine was a device designed to decapitate those condemned to death. Adopted by the National Assembly in 1791, it was seen as a humane form of execution that helped realize the principle of equality before the law. Previously only aristocrats had the "privilege" of decapitation if condemned; peasants were hanged.

Revolutionary culture

With the radicalization of the Revolution came a keen desire by many revolutionaries, most notably Robespierre, to completely overhaul French society. For these men, this was not just politics. They saw in the proclamation of the Republic an opportunity to transform society to its core. One of the most startling efforts was the creation of an entirely new revolutionary calendar. From September 1793, the years would be renumbered starting with Year I. Each year consisted of 12 months, each month had three ten-day weeks, and each day had ten hours which lasted 100 minutes. The days leftover at the end of the year were reserved for Republican festivities. The months were renamed to better reflect the weather—the summer month Thermidor was taken from the Greek word for summer heat, and days were named after tools, animals or food. To the enlightened thinkers of the Revolution the use of a base ten was a very rational and ordered concept, mirroring the use of base ten measures—the adoption of a metric system. With the metric system, the whole country was brought under one rational system of measurement. Streets and cities were renamed. Titles were abolished and the blanket egalitarian form of address "citizen" was used for all—emphasizing the indivisibility of person from nation.

The new revolutionary republic that was taking shape if not in the streets then at least in Robespierre's mind came to be called the Republic of Virtue. Virtue had a fairly specific connotation in terms of the Republic. Robespierre sought to replace the Christian basis for the state with Virtue—that which the state needed to survive. In some ways it was a kind of civic mindedness raised to the level of quasi religion complete with festivals, ritual, icons and music. By June 1794 this quasi-religion was formalized into the Cult of the Supreme Being, designed to give an amorphous form to the idea of Virtue that would be acceptable to Christians resistant to the secularization of the

Discussion point:

What role does ritual and pageantry play in society? Why did Robespierre feel the need to dress up his idea of Virtue with public celebrations?

state while not disagreeable to those who had embraced the Cult of Reason earlier in the Revolution. The painter Jacques-Louis David was the main propagandist of this Republic of Virtue, at once purging the images, songs and rituals of the Christian monarchy and replacing them with Republican imagery, music, and festivals—*lady liberty*, reason, the tricolour of the Revolution, *les Marseilles*. Because of the increasing centralization of control, these cultural developments carried with them the force of law and this meant enforcement by the Committee of Public Safety, the main instrument of the Terror.

Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794)

Robespierre was a lawyer from the north of France who came to prominence in the National Assembly as a member of the Jacobin Club and later as a public accuser in Paris. He was instrumental in the machinations that brought the National Convention into existence. As a delegate to the Convention and member of the Jacobin Club he argued strenuously against war with Austria and for the execution of the king both of which brought him into conflict with the Girondin faction of the Jacobin Club. He was elected to the Committee of Public Safety in July 1793, soon dominating that body and using his position to root out those he believed too moderate in revolutionary fervour such as Brissot and Danton and those whom he feared politically such as Hebert. Although he was widely thought to be “incorruptible” his increasing fanaticism alienated the population and eventually the Convention and even the Committee of Public Safety. He was arrested in July, 1794 and executed.



The Terror, 1793–94

By 1793 the National Convention was faced with a number of very serious problems. On the home front it had to deal with a riotous population in Paris, and series of regional revolts in places such as the **Vendée**, soaring prices made worse by war-time shortages, and an invading enemy that was now bolstered by the finances and naval power of Great Britain. The approach adopted by the Convention, now dominated by the radical Jacobin faction known as the Mountain, was one of centralized economic control, uniformity of opinion, and violent, state-sponsored repression—The Terror.

The Terror was a programme by which the Convention hoped to gain control of the country and win the war. The Committee of Public Safety, a committee of the Convention, was entrusted with the management of this programme. This group of twelve, each of whom had to stand for re-election by the Convention each month, began to function very much like an executive, with broad power to pursue the war, which in fact gave it broad powers to co-ordinate the economy, dictate military strategy, round up and try suspected counter-revolutionaries, and manage the apparatus of censorship. Eventually this Committee even drafted the new republican constitution.

The Committee of Public Safety's plan for winning the war centred on mobilizing the whole nation:

- *levée en masse*—conscription of men and material
- wage controls—law of maximum
- price controls—law of maximum
- seizure of gold
- ban on the export of gold
- ban on hoarding
- centralization of scientific and industrial innovation.

The **Vendée** is a region in west central France that rose in open rebellion against the Republican Convention in the spring of 1793. Grievances revolved around the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, conscription and centralization. The civil war in the Vendée raged until 1796.

At the heart of the work of the Committee of Public Safety was the suppression of counter-revolutionaries. To this end the Committee was assisted by a number of laws, which biased the proceedings in the Committee's favour. The Law of Suspect, passed on 17 September 1794, empowered Revolutionary Tribunals and local revolutionary committees to round up and try anyone who through their actions or words had not shown sufficient devotion to the Revolution. Later in the Terror this incredibly sweeping law was augmented by the Law of 22 Prairial through which the accused was deprived of defence counsel and the Tribunals limited to a sentence of death in the case of a guilty verdict. Without a clear definition of what constituted counter-revolutionary activity, the Terror was an instrument of political vengeance as much as revolutionary zeal. Even before the Terror officially began in September of 1793, leading Girondins had been dragged from the Convention to face charges of counter-revolution and eventual execution at the hands of an extremist faction of the Jacobins led by Jacques René Hébert. In turn, throughout the Terror, Hébert and his followers were sent to the guillotine as were Georges Danton and his followers. Hébert and his followers, the *enragés*, were calling for ever more radical suppression of suspected counter-revolutionaries. Danton and his followers, the *indulgents*, on the other hand called for an end to the Terror. Both of these factions were Jacobins, but their ideas were a threat to the work of the Committee of Public Safety and its chairman, Robespierre.

Throughout the course of 1793–4, the Terror saw to the arrest of over 300,000 people, 17,000 of whom were executed although some estimates are much higher. This does not include those who died in prison, nor does it include those killed in combat in provinces that were in open revolt against the Convention such as the Vendée and Brittany. One might think that what was left of the aristocracy or **refractory clergy** made up the majority of those deemed to be counter-revolutionaries. This was not the case. The majority of the Terror's victims were members of the Third Estate. The Terror was not a monolithic structure. It operated differently at different times and in different places. While uttering pro-royalist (or Dantonist or Hébertist) musings could get you brought before a Tribunal, so could any number of other less political actions. The **reverse onus** implied by the Law of Suspect and the Law of 22 Prairial meant that the Terror could be, and was, used to settle all manner of political, economic, business or



What are the risks involved in using force to eliminate political rivals?



A fiery orator, Danton was a controversial revolutionary leader. Initially a radical he eventually was the acknowledged leader of the *indulgents*, a faction that called for an end to the reign of Terror. His last words typified his personality, "Show my head to the people. It is worth seeing." Although Robespierre eliminated most of his rivals, both the *indulgents* and the *enragés*, still others rose in opposition.

Refractory clergy Clergy who refused to take the oath of allegiance to the French government as head of the Church.

Reverse onus is the legal practice of requiring the accused in an action to prove their innocence. In terms of Terror, the accused had to prove that were not counter-revolutionary. Reverse onus places a great deal of power in the hands of accusers.

personal matters. An accusation was often all it took to get arrested and brought before a Tribunal and ultimately to the guillotine. The public ritual of execution became an important aspect of the Terror. The condemned rode through the streets in carts to the central square where the guillotine was set up on a platform. This applied to all the condemned, from the former Queen, Marie Antoinette executed in October 1793, to countless condemned peasants. The executions were a common pastime for many citizens and were often witnessed by large crowds, especially early in the Terror. The public nature of the executions had its purpose. It demonstrated the coercive power of the state and was therefore seen as a deterrent to counter-revolutionaries. It was also an act of the nation and as such should be witnessed by the nation—an example of civic participation.

Outside of Paris the example of the Vendée spread to other areas and cities of France. At times Bordeaux, Toulouse, Lyons, and Marseilles were in revolt against the central government in Paris. The Convention labelled these rebellions Federalism, adherence to which then became an example of counter-revolutionary activity and subject to the Terror. Representatives from the Convention were sent “on mission” to various departments of the country to ensure obedience to the dictates of the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety and to apply the Terror when they were not obeyed.

By the summer of 1794, however, the popularity of the Committee was at a low ebb. The war was now going well for France and the public could see little reason for the continuation

TOK Link

Ways of Knowing—Language

Robespierre defended the Terror in a speech to the National Convention on 5 February 1794. In it he explained the relationship of Terror to Virtue:

If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a special principle as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most urgent needs.

Maximilien Robespierre. “Justification of the Use of Terror”, Speech to the National Convention, 5 February 1794. *Modern History Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/mod/robespierre-terror.html>.

Any terrorist attack is an act of cowardice. It is an act of murder. It is a barbaric act that violates the fundamental principles of human decency.

Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister of Australia, responding to the bombing of a Jakarta hotel, 2009.



How does Robespierre's use of the word “Terror” differ from Prime Minister Rudd's usage? What do you think are the reasons for this difference? What are the knowledge issues associated with each of these statements?

Discussion point:

A number of modern constitutions expressly state that those accused of crimes have the right to the presumption of innocence.



Why do some people believe the idea of reverse onus in criminal law to be dangerous? When else in history has the concept of reverse onus been used by governments?

Activity:

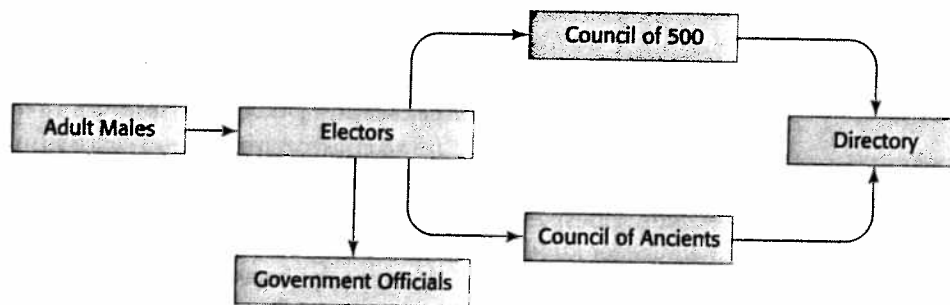
Robespierre

Maximilian Robespierre is a complex historic figure with his principles and actions often seemingly at odds with each other. Research, analyse and evaluate the career of Robespierre from the 1780s through to his execution in July of 1794 using the following topics as a guide.

- Philosophical influences and principles
- Early career
- Role in the National Assembly
- Role in the National Convention
- Role on the Committee of Public Safety
- Ideas of Virtue and the implementation of the Republic of Virtue
- Conflict with the *enragés* and the *indulgent*

of the draconian policies of the Committee of Public Safety. Much of this animosity was directed against the chairman of the Committee and virtual dictator of the country, Robespierre. As the rate of executions rose during the late spring of 1794, public dissatisfaction turned into political dissatisfaction. The Convention took action against Robespierre and his followers in July 1794 (*Thermidor* in the new revolutionary calendar). After a brief struggle in which the army sided with the Convention, Robespierre and his followers, having lost both their legitimacy and monopoly of force, were captured and put to the guillotine the next day.

The Directory, 1795–99



With the fall of Robespierre and the **Thermidorian Reaction** that followed, the revolutionary pendulum began to swing back. After a short, sharp period of reactionary popular and official violence against Terrorists called the White Terror, the Convention set about constructing yet another system of government in hopes of realizing the principles of the Revolution. The result was to be a return of the bourgeoisie as the dominant political class in the new government, called the Directory for the executive branch of government.

This new government was to be indirectly elected by universal adult male suffrage. These voters would choose electors, generally wealthy and propertied, who would then choose local and national officials as well as the members of the bicameral legislative assembly. By the time the first free elections were held under the new constitution in 1797, royalist politicians dominated the results, a fact that did not bode well for members of the Convention who had played roles in the trial and execution of the King or the Terror. Without any significant legitimacy, as the elections proved, these ex-Conventionists would have to rely on establishing a monopoly of force to govern, and this would mean the complicity of at least part of the army. The general to whom they turned was Napoleon Bonaparte.

The **Thermidorian reaction** refers to the removal of Robespierre, Louis de Saint-Just and their followers from power in the summer of 1794 (*Thermidor* in the new calendar). The Thermidoreans quickly moved to dismantle the instruments of the Terror including the Committee of Public Safety, but not before it executed Robespierre, Saint-Just and other "Terrorists".

Discussion point:

... the Revolution, like Saturn, devouring successively all her children, will produce at last a despotism with the calamities that accompany it ...

This quote is from a speech by the Girondin Pierre Vergniaud on 13 March 1793. Examine the events from 1789 to 1794. To what extent is his characterization of the French Revolution devouring its children accurate in this period? To what extent did his prediction of tyranny come to pass?

Activity:

Source analysis

Was there a revolutionary Class?

Source A

The following is an excerpt from *The German Ideology* written by Karl Marx in 1845–46.

When the French bourgeoisie overthrew the rule of the aristocracy, it thereby made it possible for many proletarians to raise themselves above the proletariat, but only insofar as they became bourgeois.

Source: Karl Marx quoted in Furet, F. (ed.). 1986. *Marx and the French Revolution*. Chicago, USA. University of Chicago Press. p. 146.

Source B

The following is an excerpt written by the historian William Doyle in 2001.

... few fortunes were made in the professions. The lot—and often indeed the aim—of most professional bourgeoisie was to vegetate in modest, undemanding, but comfortable circumstances....

Source: Doyle, William. 2002. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*. Oxford, UK. Oxford University Press. p. 25.

Source C

The following is an excerpt written by the historian Simon Schama in 1992.

One of the prevailing clichés of old-régime history is that privilege was inimical to commercial enterprise. But even a cursory examination of the eighteenth-century French economy ... reveals the nobility deeply involved in finance, business and industry ... Less well known, however, is the extent to which they were important participants in banking, maritime trade ... and in industrial enterprise of the most innovative kind. At the very heart of the French elite, then,

is a capitalist nobility of immense significance to the future of the national economy.

Source: Schama, Simon. 1992. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. New York, USA. Alfred Knopf. p. 18.

Source D

The following is an excerpt from the pamphlet "What is the Third Estate?" written by the revolutionary Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès in 1789.

It is not sufficient to show that privileged persons, far from being useful to the nation, cannot but enfeeble and injure it; it is necessary to prove further that the noble order does not enter at all into the social organization; that it may indeed be a burden upon the nation, but that it cannot of itself constitute a nation.

Source: Whitcomb, M. (ed.). 1899. *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*. vol. 6. Philadelphia, USA. University of Pennsylvania History Department. pp. 32–35.

Questions

- 1 a What does Schama mean when he writes "One of the prevailing clichés of old-régime history is that privilege was inimical to commercial enterprise?" [Source C]
- b What were "the professions?" [Source B]
- 2 Compare and contrast the views of the nobility in Source C and Source D.
- 3 With reference to their origin and purpose, evaluate the value and limitations of Source A and Source B to historians studying the *ancien régime*.
- 4 Using the sources and further research, evaluate the extent to which the social structure of the *ancien régime* was a major cause of the French Revolution.

Bonaparte's Rise

By 1796 the French Republic had been at war for four years, and had finally managed to take the fight beyond its borders. Bonaparte took command of French forces fighting the Austrians in northern Italy. This Italian campaign and surrounding events were to prove pivotal in the development of Bonaparte not only as a military leader but as a civil administrator as well. Operating far from a weak central government meant that Napoleon had a great deal of freedom. His soldiers were paid because of him, not the Directory. His defeated enemies negotiated with him, not the Directory. It was he who administered his conquered territory, not the Directory. In essence, he fulfilled the duties of a central government in northern Italy, all the while gaining important experience.

Bonaparte's influence became evident when it was to him that the government turned when the royalists won the elections of 1797. In September of that same year, under the watchful eye of

Bonaparte's troops, the Directory invalidated the elections and purged sympathetic directors and officials, thereby repudiating what legitimacy it did enjoy. This was the coup d'état of Fructidor. In the absence of any meaningful legitimacy after 1797, the Directory had to rely on its monopoly of force, which included a return to many of the tactics of the Committee of Public Safety and most importantly a dependence on the army and this meant a reliance on Napoleon.

France's most significant and constant enemy since 1792 had been Great Britain. It had been the British fleet that had occupied the port of Toulon and British funds that had sustained Austrian forces since 1792. The political and financial burdens of its anti-revolutionary foreign policy had significantly weakened Britain's ability to press the fight. The British treasury was haemorrhaging gold to support its allies. Poor harvests threatened its food supply. Even the vaunted Royal Navy was in crisis. In 1797 ships of the Channel Fleet at Spithead and Nore mutinied against poor wages and living conditions. The principles of the French Revolution provided much of the intellectual structure to these mutinies. The net result of these developments was that peace with France was an attractive prospect for the British Prime Minister William Pitt.



How might the IB Learner Profile relate to the recovery and study of antiquities?

After five years of war and all the difficulties that accompanied it, peace would also seem appealing to the Directory. Not necessarily. Much of the dictatorial powers that the Directory claimed and exercised were justified by the necessities of war. If peace broke out, the calls for free elections, the end of censorship, arbitrary arrest, the purging of opposition and the like would be hard to ignore. Likewise, the problem for Bonaparte was that, as a soldier, his career advancement required war.

After the coup d'état of Fructidor and Napoleon's role in it, the prospect of peace with Britain evaporated and the French government began plotting an invasion of Great Britain, an expedition to be commanded by Napoleon. Despite Britain's tribulations, the prospect for the success of such an invasion was dubious and Napoleon knew it. How then to threaten Britain while at the same time advancing his career? The unlikely answer was Egypt.

As unfeasible as an expedition to Egypt may seem in hindsight, at the time it was infinitely preferable to an invasion of the British Isles. From Egypt, theoretically, France could threaten Britain's rich eastern



Napoleon conceived of the expedition to Egypt as more than a military mission. He took academics, scientists, and historians to study the ancient Egyptian culture and uncovered and studied treasures such as the Rosetta Stone. Much of the treasure that the French discovered returned with them to Europe. The ownership of these articles has been disputed ever since.

trade. The expedition suited Napoleon's growing estimation of himself. Had not Alexander's fame been cemented in Egypt? The intellectual treasures of Egypt appealed to Bonaparte's Enlightenment pedigree. For the Directory, an expedition to Egypt would keep the ambitious and increasingly popular Napoleon away from Parisian intrigues while maintaining the need for war-time measures. The **Mamelukes** who administered Egypt for their Ottoman overlords, though fierce warriors, should pose little problem for Bonaparte's veterans of the Italian campaign. It would certainly be easier to elude the Royal Navy in the vast Mediterranean than in the narrow English Channel. In 1798, Napoleon and an army of 40,000 embarked at Marseilles, evaded a British Royal Navy squadron in the Mediterranean and landed in Egypt.

The **Mamelukes** were a caste of soldiers and administrators who defended and oversaw parts of the Ottoman Empire such as Egypt in the name of the Sultan.

From Directory to Consulate

As we will see, Napoleon's Egyptian escapade did not last long. In his absence the Directory grew even weaker, the population grew weary of yet another repressive regime, high prices and rumours of corruption. Foreign armies were again moving against France and there appeared to be no relief in the immediate future.

The Directory, indeed, had little faith in itself, with men like the Abbe Sieyès, Talleyrand, and Roger Ducos musing that France needed a form of government with a stronger executive branch. Again, however, in the absence of any popular legitimacy, these conspiratorial directors needed a monopoly of force to achieve the change they sought. Getting wind of this plot and seeing opportunity in it, Napoleon abandoned his army in Egypt and returned to France to once again lend muscle to a seizure of power. He remained popular despite being stranded in Egypt, but he was not strong enough to assume power alone. In November 1799, he called together the Council of 500 and demanded that it change the constitution to reflect the views of Sieyès and the other conspirators. To the General's shock the 500 refused and began to hurl abuse at him. At this point, troops were called in to accomplish with muskets what Bonaparte could not with words and so completed Napoleon's second coup d'état—the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire.

The Directory was thus abolished and yet another governmental system was established, the fourth since the Revolution had begun ten years earlier.

The Consulate was a sort of triumvirate, where three Consuls shared power, though not equally. The Consuls were guided by three bodies. The Council of State drafted proposed laws. The Tribunal could debate these laws, but had no decision-making power. The Legislative Assembly could pass or reject legislation without discussion. Theoretically, members

Activity:

Napoleon and Egypt

Divide the class into three groups:

- Group A: Supporters of Napoleon
- Group B: Opponents of Napoleon
- Group C: Directors

Group A will make a presentation arguing in favour of the expedition to Egypt in 1798. Group B will argue against this expedition. Group C will question both groups and vote on whether or not to authorize the expedition.

Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, abbé (1748–1836)

Very influential in the early stages of the Revolution having a hand in the drafting of both the Tennis Court Oath and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, Sieyès had long been a vocal opponent of vested privilege. He sat in the Estates General, National Convention, The Council of 500, and eventually became a Director. He even served a short term on the Committee of Public Safety after the fall of Robespierre. Convinced that democracy run amok had caused the worst excesses of the Revolution, Sieyès argued for the strengthening of the executive branch of the government at the expense of the legislative branch and as such was instrumental in the coup that brought Napoleon and the Consulate to power in 1799.



of these bodies were elected by universal male suffrage. Citizens voted candidates to lists of Notables. It was from these lists that the Council of State would appoint all the officials of the regime, including the members of the three parliamentary bodies. It was not difficult to discern that real decision-making rested with the Council of State and within this body primarily with the First Consul. Napoleon was the First Consul. Nevertheless, Napoleon felt the need for some expression of popular legitimacy for this new regime and so submitted this scheme to the people of France. In an overwhelming show of support of questionable legality and validity, the French accepted the Consulate in a referendum held in November 1800. They were not to be meaningfully consulted again.

Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754–1838)



Talleyrand was a ubiquitous politician and diplomat throughout the Revolutionary, Napoleonic, and Restoration period. Born into the Second Estate, Talleyrand later joined the clergy and grew even wealthier from church appointments. He was elected to represent the First Estate in the Estates General of 1789. A skilled orator and negotiator, Talleyrand was instrumental in the drafting of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. As the Revolution radicalized, Talleyrand escaped to London and later to the United States. After the Thermidorian Reaction he returned to France and in 1797 was named Foreign Minister. Seeing the rise of Napoleon as an opportunity for his own advancement, Talleyrand drew close to the future Emperor after 1797 becoming the Consulate's Foreign Minister and later Foreign Minister in the Empire until 1807. He distanced himself from Napoleon after 1807. Having spent the time after 1807 ingratiating himself to those who would eventually defeat Napoleon, he was France's representative at the Congress of Vienna, his skill largely responsible for the favorable terms France received from the victors. Talleyrand would once again emerge as an important figure in the reign of King Louis-Philippe as France's ambassador to Great Britain.

Why did France accept this sham democracy, this thinly veiled dictatorship? The answer is more complex than it might at first seem. In short, Napoleon gave many French citizens what they had been looking for after ten years of revolutionary upheaval—stability. Stability, however, meant different things for different people. For the majority of working people it meant economic stability in the form of stable prices. For businessmen it meant stable currency and an ordered economic system. For aristocrats and royalists it meant a legally stable system that would protect them as much as it would protect the revolutionaries. For terrorists and regicides it likewise meant a legally stable system that would protect them from those that would take revenge for their past deeds while at the same time protect the gains that had been made in human equality. For manufacturers it meant a stable demand for their wares. For Catholics it meant a stable religious system that permitted them to worship in public. For all citizens of France it meant social and administrative stability and an end to outbursts of mob justice. For French nationalists it meant a stable and united France, purged of regional revolt. Stability was thus Napoleon's goal, not ideological or philosophical principle. As a master of military logistics, it was practicality that he valued. If enlightenment principles brought stability, so be it. If he needed to resort to elements of the *ancien régime* then he would. Liberalism and conservatism were meaningless labels to him. He would reward those who could and would help him, regardless of political background. Amnesty was granted to *émigrés* who returned and pledged their loyalty to him. He valued competence and loyalty and received it in good measure. Through his embrace of pragmatism, Napoleon found ways to achieve either the stability that each group desired or at least the illusion of that stability.